

BOOK REVIEWS

Emperor and Ancestor: State and Lineage in South China. By David Faure. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007. Pp. xii + 464. \$50.00.

China hasn't always been China, and it was by no means inevitable that the diverse peoples and terrain of eastern Eurasia would cohere as a twentieth-century nation. A propensity to project backward from the present has likewise misread many Chinese social institutions as timelessly "traditional." David Faure's 科大衛 satisfying new study not only shows us how the lands and people of Guangzhou's Pearl River Delta were physically and culturally made Chinese, it turns a key feature of the family system—the lineage—into an institution with an actual history.

Sociologists and anthropologists have been undertaking studies of Chinese kinship and local life since at least the 1920s, but the work of Maurice Freedman established the "lineage" as the proper translation of *zu* 族 and a worthy object of intellectual inquiry.¹ Historians began to write local histories in the 1970s, some of which investigated family systems, but we still do not have a systematic long-term study of the different family systems found in what became China and how they changed. David Faure's *Emperor and Ancestor* combines serious inquiry into the history of the lineage as it took shape in southern China, with a lively analysis of the emergence of a Chinese society in the Pearl River Delta in the late imperial era. This combination is not surprising, for Faure is both an able political and economic historian and an experienced fieldworker concerned with social and cultural matters.

This book is based on two decades of Hong-Kong-based research, and on amiable and productive cooperation with scholars of the South China Research Group. The dissertations, books, and articles written in Chinese by this network of energetic colleagues are introduced here.

The vivid memorable detail of *Emperor and Ancestor* is no obstacle to a clear focus and unifying argument. The story starts in the twelfth century and continues, with increasing fullness, through the nineteenth century. The emperors in question are those of the Ming and Qing dynasties. The ancestors are those of the newly enriched families of the Delta of the Pearl River 珠江 in Guangdong province (mostly on the Macao side) who transformed swampy sea coasts into fertile rice lands. Faure's essential argument is straightforward: it was by using and working with the state that the lineage emerged during this period as a powerful and permissible form of organizational technology.

Contrary to the widely held views that kinship ties were independent from, hostile to, or competitive with the interests of central power, Faure's persuasive case is that local

¹ Beginning with his *Lineage Organization in Southeastern China*, London School of Economics Monographs on Social Anthropology, no. 18 (London: Athlone Press, 1958).

lineages sought out and energetically used formal relationships with and approval from the imperial state. He uses the complex history of the Delta to emphasize two kinds of relationships in particular, both of which may seem unexpected. He explains how economic developments made it desirable for local families to register their land and take on tax liability, and he emphasizes the importance of the adoption of orthodox state rituals to the lineage's acceptance as a legitimate social actor. The central government was thus essential to these lineages, and their histories were deeply intertwined.

Twenty-two short chapters move this story forward at a pleasing pace, while significant eras are highlighted through five larger parts (Historical Geography, From Registered Households to Lineages, Lineages Gentrified, From Ming to Qing, The Nineteenth-Century Transformation). Faure writes just as confidently and persuasively about complicated national events as he does about local ones, and at almost every point he can simultaneously contribute to both local and national history.

The first five chapters provide useful background to the emergence of the lineage in the sixteenth century, and set out the basic dynamics. The Delta is radically transformed as land is reclaimed from the sea ("the sands," *shatian* 沙田); some of those who engage in this risky and competitive business become Chinese gentry, others remain on the sands and sea as Dan (蠶, Tanka). Ritual and registration become key points of upward linkage with the state and consequent social transformation.

It cannot be overemphasized that the *lijia* registration was implemented, not because the Ming government had a sufficient staff to impose it on its population, but, as the genealogies of the Pearl River Delta show, because, once *lijia* was created, it could be manipulated by local groups in the ritual-legal context to establish or avoid claims as they saw fit. (p. 73)

Moreover, would-be local elites defined themselves by identifying with "the Neo-Confucian orthodoxy," and by the mid-Ming,

a new political ideology was gaining ground that made ritual central and lineage the means of promoting state-society relationships. It was this ideology that ultimately defined Ming and Qing society. (p. 108)

As he takes us through the formative events in the Delta, Faure illuminates the different processes by which lineages came into being (calmly contrasting their later, less accurate accounts) and the ways in which the people of the sands used these events (e.g. episodes of piracy and rebellion) to make themselves legitimate and powerful. Ancestral rites were central to the story. "By the early Qing (mid-seventeenth century)," he shows, it had become "commonplace for territorial communities to appear as local lineages in which sacrifice to ancestors was centered on an ancestral hall" (p. 177).

In the chapters on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, we are shown, *inter alia*, the importance of land deeds, endowments, genealogies, and ancestral halls as modes of organization and self-definition. Here, the histories of different lineages are used to illustrate variety and complexity, as local families scrambled to respond to new circumstances. The locally manifest national crises of the nineteenth century challenged existing financial arrangements and introduced revolutionary new weaponry. To survive,

lineages and officials maneuvered energetically, and here and throughout Faure is especially good at analyzing the variety of informal “arrangements” that encumbered all their formal transactions. In general, he shows us both the underlying mechanisms and the dynamism that propelled lineages and officials through changing times.

In Chapter 22, he brings the story into the early twentieth century, and sees the change from the Qing dynasty to the Republic of China as a turning point in the history of the lineage. What could its role be in a state that was now empowering businessmen, individual citizens, and a host of new urban institutions? Although lineages did not decline, they were denounced; moreover, they had “become irrelevant to the definition of the local to the center” (p. 341) and “could not fit readily into a state where no emperor reigned” (p. 347).

An admirably broad array of sources undergirds Faure’s history, and reveals how much can be done if one looks outside the library. Printed materials are amplified by handwritten ones: contracts, letters, record books, and especially genealogies. Moreover, Faure has helpfully translated for the reader longer and shorter bits from these sources (e.g. the 1640 contract on pp. 226–27). Knowledge of geography was essential, buildings and inscriptions *in situ* provided useful data, and interviews have enriched Faure’s understanding of the past and its modern interpretations. Like Cynthia Brokaw’s recent work on book publishing in western Fujian (liberally illustrated), *Emperor and Ancestor* demonstrates that armchair local history should no longer be acceptable.²

Another of Faure’s strengths, grounded in local knowledge, is his ability to see the social realities hidden behind and within his sources. Knowledgeable, sensible, sceptical, and judicious, he can plausibly relate words and deeds, convey the inevitable contradictions in human behaviour, and appreciate the fluidity and complexities of life. He is thus able to combine a thoughtful analysis with a rich, specific, and very believable history.

In some ways this book is indeed about “South China,” as its subtitle proclaims. It deals with what our secondary literature has defined as the classic Chinese lineage, that (actually, those) of Guangdong and Fujian provinces. In the Epilogue (Beyond the Pearl River Delta) Faure attempts to put his findings in this wider context. He compares what we know about lineages in Jiangxi, Fujian, and South China more generally (citing recent research). These comparisons suggest, he believes, that his insights into the changing ways that local officials handled tax obligations and the status appeal of state ritual were also significant to lineage history elsewhere, although in different and sometimes still unclear ways. And yet “the South” still remains a vague area, as does “the North.” Faure also brings in some of his own recent interesting work on lineages in Shanxi, but lack of comparisons still forces him to conclude that

In North China, it can now be said quite categorically that it is simply untrue that the lineage as a form of social organization was any less common than in South China, but the historical record has been so little studied that historians

² Cynthia J. Brokaw, *Commerce in Culture: The Sibao Book Trade in the Qing and Republican Periods* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007). The territory of these booksellers from Tingzhou prefecture extended into Guangdong. See pp. 199–202.

should declare near ignorance as to how local society had changed in the area. (p. 363)

We can only hope that future comparisons will be much easier to make because of the data and the ideas that David Faure has set out for us here.

In 368 reasonably dense pages of text, Faure treats his subject with both breadth and thoroughness. Certain aspects are missing, however, perhaps necessarily, but not exactly obviously. Let me call them to the attention of the general reader and use them as encouragement to future scholars of this subject.

The region singled out for attention in *Emperor and Ancestor* is both bigger than and different from the village, city, or provincial studies that make up most “local” histories.³ This was a laudable choice, but I am less sure that the “Delta” was systematically defined. From the *shatian* come many of the book’s main actors, and Faure’s chosen “region” seems to revolve around these new lands. The small cities and towns of the Pearl River Delta are the sites of much action in this story, but they are not given concentrated attention. While it is refreshing to find Guangzhou the city relocated to the margins and dealt with glancingly, there are dangers to this approach. One of Faure’s overarching claims is that during the late imperial era “imperial ideology sought to relate the state to rural society and peripheralized the cities” (p. 14). Can such an assertion be demonstrated without extended investigation into the cities and towns? Steven B. Miles’s *Sea of Learning: Mobility and Identity in Nineteenth-Century Guangzhou*,⁴ which examines the involvement of Delta families in the intellectual life of Guangzhou, might lead to a different conclusion.

It concerns me more that non-agricultural production plays only a shadowy role in Faure’s book. His emphasis on rich agricultural land makes it hard to judge how much lineage wealth came from other sources, but passing references suggest that salt and iron—at the very least—deserved attention. Both were valuable local resources and are mentioned much more often than the inadequate index entries would indicate. Shekwan/Shiwan 石灣 ceramics may also have warranted a closer look. Would the story of the Pearl River Delta lineages be different if wealth had been defined more broadly? The concentration on agriculture and the neglect of China’s pre-industrial industries is regrettably all too common among historians, and it seems to me time for us to give serious attention to other kinds of technical and material resources.

Although a much more generous supply of maps and photographs would have suited the material, this book has been nicely produced by Stanford University Press. I do not understand, however, why the notes have been placed at maximum inconvenience to the reader. Can it really be so expensive to put footnotes at the bottom of the page? And if there must be endnotes, couldn’t the relevant page numbers be placed at top of the page? Instead, we here have the worst possible system: only chapter titles at the top of the page

³ E.g., Lillian M. Li’s *Fighting Famine in North China: State, Market, and Environmental Decline, 1690s–1990s* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007) takes the Hai-he 海河 basin (part of the North China plain) as its focus.

⁴ Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006.

in the text and only chapter numbers at the top of the endnote pages. It is slightly more understandable, but still very regrettable, that anyone would prefer an old fashioned glossary to a combined glossary-index, and that the index itself is so inadequate. Authors: please pay attention and insist on better.

Readers: These small things should not impede your pleasure in this excellent, interesting, and important book by a scholar whose fine combination of library and field work should be an inspiration to us all.

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Great Clarity: Daoism and Alchemy in Early Medieval China. By Fabrizio Pregadio. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006. Pp. xvii + 367. \$60.00.

Nearly twenty years ago, for an international conference, I was asked to sum up the state of research on Chinese alchemy. I reported that it was barely hanging on to life, but the study of alchemy in other cultures was also moribund.¹ The reason was not at all esoteric. Such research is inherently, quintessentially, a multidisciplinary pursuit. Nevertheless, the specialists on chemical history were not reading the specialists on alchemical art, and vice versa; both groups were ignoring religious hermeneutics and anthropology; and the philologists were disregarding them all. The result was a regular flow of narrowly focused articles that few people read and that did not change our understanding of what alchemy is, how it evolved, and why it is important.

Between then and now, there have been enough groundbreaking publications to indicate that the patient, if not full of life, is at least recovering. Bruce Moran has made alchemy an important part of his studies on European science, medicine, and patronage in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries. He has shown for the first time how alchemy survived—and in parts of Europe, flourished—in the early modern period. William R. Newman and Lawrence Principe have shown how tightly linked alchemy and the nascent chemistry of the seventeenth century were, and thus banished a host of ancient stereotypes.

Alas, the few students of Chinese alchemy still do not follow advances in the study of Europe, and those of European alchemy remain unaware of anything they might learn from China. Nevertheless, the recent work of Fabrizio Pregadio has carried our understanding considerably beyond its primitive state *c.* 1989. He has begun to block out a real history, which locates the important historical transitions and explains why they took place when they did. Pregadio's essay "Elixirs and Alchemy," and his collaboration

¹ "Research on the History of Chinese Alchemy," in *Alchemy Revisited: Proceedings of the International Conference on the History of Alchemy at the University of Groningen, 17–19 April 1989*, ed. Z.R.W.M. von Martels (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), pp. 3–21.